

What is claimed is:

1. An automated vehicle release system, comprising:
a centralized data management system; and
a vehicle to be released to one of a plurality of users, said vehicle having:
original equipment window glass,
a local computer in wireless communication with said centralized data management system, and
an interactive interface comprising said window glass and a touch sensor associated with said window glass, said touch sensor being in communication with said local computer, said interactive interface being accessible by the user from outside said vehicle and through said window glass;
said centralized data management system receiving data entered into said local computer by the user via said interactive interface, release of said vehicle to the user being authorized by said centralized data management system in response to the data entered by the user and being actuated by said local computer in response to an authorization signal received from the centralized data management system.
2. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 1, wherein said original equipment window glass is nonplanar.
3. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 1, wherein said touch sensor comprises a flexible, substantially transparent sheet in contact with an interior surface of said window glass.
4. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 3, wherein said sheet is translucent.
5. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 4, wherein said sheet is substantially transparent.
6. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 3, wherein said sheet conforms to said window glass interior surface.
7. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 3, wherein said sheet is adhered to said window glass interior surface.

8. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 1, wherein said interactive interface further comprises a monitor in communication with said local computer, said monitor having a display which is visible through said window glass and said touch sensor from outside said vehicle.

9. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 1, wherein said touch sensor is a capacitive touch sensor.

10. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 9, wherein said capacitive touch sensor comprises a substantially transparent substrate sheet on which electrically conductive material has been applied.

11. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 10, wherein said substrate sheet is flexible.

12. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 11, wherein said substrate sheet is polyester.

13. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 10, wherein said electrically conductive material is ITO.

14. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 10, wherein said electrically conductive material is in the form of bars.

15. The automated release system for a vehicle of claim 14, wherein said bars are substantially horizontal.

16. A method for releasing a vehicle to one of a plurality of different users, comprising:

receiving data from a user located outside the vehicle, through the original equipment window glass of the vehicle and a touch sensor in communication with the window glass, into a local computer located inside the vehicle;

communicating the data entered into the local computer to a centralized data management system remotely located relative to the vehicle;

communicating an authorization based on the data entered by the user from the centralized data management system to the local computer; and

permitting access by the user to the vehicle in response to the authorization received by the local computer from the centralized data management system.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein access by the user to the vehicle is automatically permitted in response to the authorization received by the local computer from the centralized data management system.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein the vehicle is released to a user renting the vehicle.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising displaying, to a user located outside the vehicle, terms by which the vehicle may be rented through the original equipment window glass of the vehicle and the touch sensor.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising displaying the terms on a monitor mounted inside the vehicle and in communication with the local computer.

21. The method of claim 16, further comprising displaying, to a user located outside the vehicle, the type of data to be entered by the user through the original equipment window glass of the vehicle and the touch sensor.

22. The method of claim 21, further comprising displaying the type of data to be entered by the user to the user through the touch sensor and the window glass.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the type of data to be entered by the user is displayed on a monitor located inside the vehicle and in communication with the local computer.

24. The method of claim 21, further comprising detecting with the touch sensor a location on the exterior surface of the original equipment window glass that the user has touched in entering data, and correlating that location with a portion of a display visible to the user through the touch screen and the window glass.

25. The method of claim 16, wherein the user is a member of a group of preselected potential users.

26. An automated vehicle release system, comprising:

a centralized data management system;

a vehicle for release to one of a plurality of users, said vehicle having a local computer in wireless communication with said centralized data management system; and

a user interface to said vehicle release system comprising a communication device separate from and located outside said vehicle, said interface being in selective

communication with one of said local computer and said centralized data management system, data entry by the user through said interface being received by said one of said local computer and said centralized data management system;

wherein, in response to data entered by the user, release of the vehicle is actuated by said local computer.

27. The automated vehicle release system of claim 26, wherein said centralized data management system receives data entered into said interface by the user, said centralized data management system provides an authorization signal to said local computer in response to the data entered by the user, and release of the vehicle is actuated by said local computer in response to said local computer receiving the authorization signal from said centralized data management system.

28. The automated vehicle release system of claim 27, wherein said centralized data management system includes information provided by the user prior to said one of said local computer and said centralized data management system receiving data entered into said interface by said user, and release of said vehicle is in response to both the data entered by the user and the information provided by the user.

29. A method for releasing a vehicle to one of a plurality of different users, comprising:

receiving data entered by a user through a communication device outside and separate from the vehicle, with one of a centralized data management system remote from the vehicle and a local computer located in the vehicle;

authorizing release of the vehicle to the user through the centralized data management system;

establishing communication between the centralized data management system and the local computer;

sending an authorization signal from the centralized data management system to the local computer; and

releasing the vehicle to the user through the local computer in response to the data received from the communication device and the local computer having received the authorization signal from the centralized data management system.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the data entered by the user is transmitted from the communication device to the centralized data management system.

31. The method of claim 29, wherein access by the user to the vehicle is automatically permitted at least partially in response to the authorization signal being received by the local computer from the centralized data management system.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein access by the user to the vehicle is automatically permitted in response to a combination of the authorization signal being received by the local computer from the centralized data management system and data entered by the user subsequently being received by the local computer from the communication device.

33. The method of claim 29, wherein the user is a member of a group of preselected potential users.

34. The method of claim 29, wherein the communication device is a telephone.

35. The method of claim 34, wherein the telephone is a cellular telephone.

36. The method of claim 29, wherein the communication device is an internet browser running on a computer.

37. The method of claim 29, further comprising, prior to receiving data entered by the user through the communication device, obtaining other user-specific information upon which the authorization is at least partially based.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein the vehicle is released to a user renting the vehicle.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein the other user-specific information includes at least one of a group consisting of credit card information and driver's license information.

40. The method of claim 29, wherein the vehicle is released to a user renting the vehicle, and the authorization is based upon information included in the data entered by the user through the communications device.